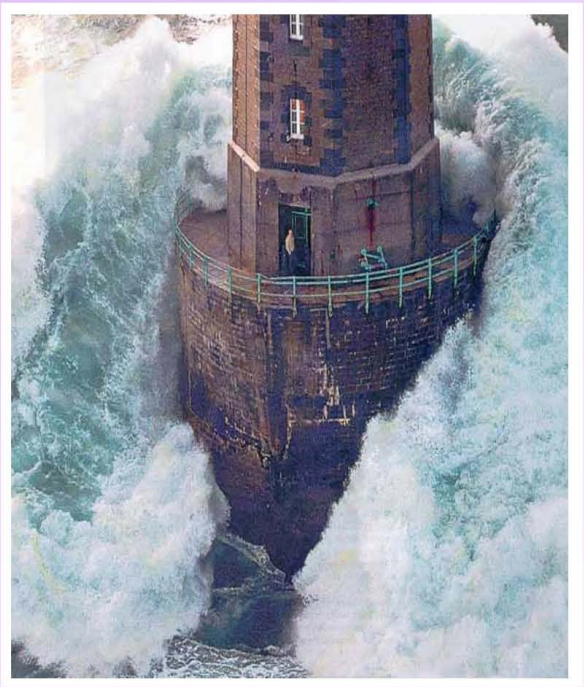
THE WISE MAN'S HOUSE



By

Nicholas C. Brightman

The Wise Man's House
Nicholas C. Brightman
© Copyright (Renewed 2026) Nicholas C. Brightman

Notes on the Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 5:1 – 7:29
Note to reader: This little book came out of a series of Bible Studies I gave to some young people. I have put them down in written form so that they can be available to whoever wants them

Cover picture: La Jument Lighthouse, France
Photo Credit: Jean Guichard, 1989.

THE WISE MAN'S HOUSE

NOTES ON THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Matthew 5:1 – 7:29

Note to reader: This little book came out of a series of Bible Studies I gave to some young people. I have put them down in written form so that they can be available to whoever wants them.

TOPIC 1: INTRODUCTION

Matthew 5:1.
When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on the side of a mountain.

The Sermon on the Mount was given by Jesus on a mountain near Capernaum by Lake Galilee. He had recently come from 40 days in the desert without food, so He was probably very skinny.

When Jesus lived on earth, the events of His life were a fulfilment of the events in the early history of the nation of Israel. This is one way we can know that Jesus is the Son of God. Here are some examples:

* Both Israel and Jesus were "The Son of God" (Exodus 4:22-23; Matthew 3:17).

* Both were refugees in Egypt (Genesis 46:1-7; Matthew 2:13-14).

* In Egypt, Pharaoh killed all the little boys in an attempt to destroy Israel; In Judea, Herod killed all the little boys in an attempt to destroy Jesus (Exodus 1:8-22; Matthew 2:16-18).

* Both were called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15).

* The Israelites were ‘baptised’ in the Red Sea (1Corinthians 10:1-4); Jesus was baptised in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13-17).

* After their baptism, both went into the desert, Israel for 40 years, Jesus for 40 days.

* Both were severely tested in the desert through *appetite* (Exodus 16:1-3; Deuteronomy 8:2-3; Matthew 4:1-4).

* Both were severely tested through *presumption* (Exodus 17:1-3; Matthew 4:5-7),

* Both were severely tested in the matter of *worship* (Exodus 32:1-6; Matthew 4:8-11).

* Israel came to a mountain (Exodus 19:1-3) where God gave them the Ten Commandment Law. Jesus went up a mountain (Matthew 5:1) and gave the Sermon on the Mount, which is an explanation of the Ten Commandment Law.

There are many more parallels between Israel and Jesus, but these ones help us to get a better understanding of what the Sermon on the Mount is all about.

Matthew 5:2.
…and he taught them:

Verses 3-12 are called the Beatitudes, or the Blessings. The word ‘blessed’ literally means ‘happy’. Therefore, although I have used the New King James Version, I have changed the word *Blessed* to *Happy*. There are 8 *Happies*, and they reveal a progress in Christian growth, from our first awareness that something is wrong in our lives, to the time we have become mature and responsible Christians who are willing to stand up for our faith.

TOPIC 2: THE HAPPIES

Matthew 5:3
Happy are the poor in spirit.

Poor in spirit refers to the way we feel when we know we are living wrong and feel bad about it. Some people feel good about doing bad stuff and are happy doing it; others feel empty and wish they could stop what they do because they know it is wrong (read Romans 7). There is no hope for those who enjoy doing bad stuff, but those who hate what they do and ask God to help them can know that they have hope. They can be happy because the kingdom of heaven can still be for them. Therefore poor in spirit in this passage mainly refers to the sense of emptiness we feel when we have no hope and believe we are lost. We know something is really missing in our lives, but we don't know what it is. Jesus says to be happy because when you feel empty because of the bad stuff you are doing, then there is hope for you.

Matthew 5:4
Happy are those who mourn.

We usually mourn when someone dies, but in this passage Jesus is talking about those who mourn because

they see their sinful condition and realise they are sinners. These are people who knew something was missing in their lives, but didn't know what it was. Now they know what the problem is – their lives are not in line with the will of God. Maybe they have read the Bible, or a friend has shared Jesus with them, and they want to get right with God. They are sorry about what they have been doing, and want to turn their lives around (that's repentance). When they repent of their sins, they can rejoice because God has promised He will forgive them – they are comforted.

Matthew 5:5.
Happy are the meek.

To be meek means to be humble, and not too proud to accept when we are wrong. It is hard for people who are not meek to ask forgiveness for sins, just as it is hard for people who are not meek to say sorry when they hurt someone. God wants us to say sorry to someone when we hurt them, and He wants us to say sorry to Him when we sin. In the same way, God wants us to forgive people when they say sorry to us because if we do not, then He also cannot forgive us. It takes meekness to ask forgiveness, but it also takes meekness to forgive. When Jesus comes to set up His kingdom of Glory on earth, there will only be meek people living there.

Matthew 5:6.
Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

We get hungry at least three times a day, and hopefully we can find good food to take away the hunger. However, the *Happies* are talking about spiritual things; just as we get hungry for physical food, so our souls hunger for spiritual food.

Many people never get hungry for spiritual food, but when we

1. Recognise our need for God (poor in spirit),
2. Feel sorrow for our sins (mourn), and
3. Humble ourselves before God (meek),

then we will also feel a desire to learn about God and His righteousness. Through prayer, Bible study, worship, and sharing what we have learnt, we will satisfy this new type of hunger. God has promised that when we seek this spiritual food and drink, we will certainly find it.

Matthew 5:7.
Happy are the merciful.

The first four *Happies* covered our first limping steps on our Christian journey. We were learning how to be sheep in the Good Shepherd's flock. Now we have grown to the point where we need to start accepting some light

responsibility. Now we are beginning to learn the process of becoming under-shepherds ourselves.

We also see that there is a pattern in the Sermon on the Mount. The first four *Happies* are about our relationship with God; the last four are about our relationship with each other. When we get to Chapter 6 we will see that it also concerns our relationship with God, while Chapter 7 focuses on how we should relate to each other. Thus the Sermon on the Mount deals with these two basic areas of importance in our lives. This pattern is found in the Old Testament as well. For example, the first four of the Ten Commandments are to do with how we worship God, and the last six are about how we treat each other. Again, we see in the Creation that God gave two institutions to humans; the first was the *Sabbath* (Genesis 2:1-3) which provides a foundation for our relationship with God, and *Marriage* (Genesis 2:18-25), which forms the basic structure for human society.

In the fifth *Happy*, we learn that, as God has been merciful to us, so we must learn to show mercy to others. This includes developing the habit of forgiving those who wrong us, and it also includes being patient with others as they stumble and fall just as we did.

Now we have grown enough that we recognise when others are getting it wrong, but we must learn to be gentle with them (2Timothy 2:24-25). Rather than scold them we must learn to guide them; rather than drive

them, we must learn to lead them. A stockman drives the cattle from behind, but a shepherd leads the sheep from in front, calling out to them, so that they can see him and hear his voice and follow. We are sheep, not cows, and we will only respond like sheep, and not like cows. As we learn to be merciful, so God has promised He will also be merciful with us.

Matthew 5:8.
Happy are the pure in heart.

This *Happy* does not come overnight; it describes that lifelong process called *Sanctification*, the gradual change from what we were before coming to Christ the first time, to what God wishes us to become – a man or woman of God. This may take years to happen, but just as a child is not aware that it is growing, so we will not be aware of what is happening to our hearts and minds. Only when we look back at our lives can we see the difference.

It is not necessary for our salvation that we reach complete purity of heart in this life. We will die before it happens. When we first became poor in spirit and came to Christ, we were accepted by God even though we were violent drunks, addicts, criminals, pimps and prostitutes. Just as a newborn baby is perfect in the sight of its parents, so we, when born again into Christ, are seen by God as perfect. That is called *Justification*;

when we are justified, we are "just-if-I'd" never sinned. We do not have to wait until we are pure in heart to become citizens of heaven; we become citizens of heaven when we become poor in spirit, and that is very good news.

When Jesus was put on the cross, there were two other men crucified with Him. Both of them were thieves, but one of them was poor in spirit. He saw Jesus' purity of heart and he saw his own corruption, and desperately wanted to be right with God before he died. *"Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom"* was his distressed cry. However, it was enough - "…you shall be with me in paradise" was Jesus' reply (Luke 23:42-43). Happy are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Of course, the thief died that same day when the soldiers broke his legs, so he didn't have much time to become pure in heart. However, when he said, "Lord, remember me…" he became just as if he had never sinned – Justified. Had he lived, he might have continued to grow from a spiritual baby into a great man of God over the course of his life. That is called *Sanctification*. You can think of Sanctification as a lifelong series of daily Justifications in which we come daily to Christ, then stumble and fall, come back to Him again, fall again, and come back to him again until gradually we are changed into the person he wants us to become.

Matthew 5:9.
Happy are the peacemakers.

Proverbs 16:7 says, *When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him*. To be regarded as a peacemaker is one of the greatest honours that can be given a person. This is someone whose very presence is calming. This person's presence can soothe frayed tempers, defuse explosive situations, and bring enemies to the peace table. The world has seen few great peacemakers, and it is likely that not many of us will ever become one. Yet Jesus includes this gift as one of the steps to Christian maturity. Why? Because it is something He wants to see in every Christian. Therefore, we should strive for it even if our life does not last long enough to reach it.

Now the struggling sinner, who began the journey poor in spirit, has so grown in grace that he or she has become a noble servant of God, one whose very presence calms our fears. This is what God plans for each one of us, and if He plans it for us, we can be certain it is possible to achieve it, even if few do.

The peacemaker is described as a son of God. In one sense, we are all sons and daughters of God because when we are born again He adopts us as His children. Jesus is the Crown Prince, the heir to the ancestral land

by right of birth, but we are His brothers and sisters by adoption, and therefore have the right to call it ours. The Garden of Eden is our ancestral land.

However, there is another meaning to the expression 'son of God'. There are a few special people in Biblical history who were given this name. Adam was one. In Job 1:6, we find that the sons of God met together in heaven. It doesn't say exactly who they were, perhaps Enoch was one, or perhaps they included representatives of unfallen worlds. Is it possible that the promise given to peacemakers is that they too will one day be among this number? We should never underestimate the plans God has for those who follow Him.

Matthew 5:10-12.
Happy are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

This does not seem anything to be happy about. Nobody likes being bullied or hurt or punished, but Jesus says we should be happy about it. It does not mean we should enjoy suffering, but it means that we can rejoice because we are being treated as the prophets of old were. The fact is that it is not possible to live a truly godly life without experiencing some sort of trouble. Jesus was a better person than any of us, yet He was still persecuted. So how much more will we be persecuted?

That does not mean we should look for trouble, but we live in a world that no longer believes the Bible, and which ridicules us for some of the things we believe and teach. Because the Bible's teachings on Creation, marriage, morality, worship etc., are no longer accepted by the world, we cannot live according to the Scriptures without getting out of step with society at large.

Now we have reached the final stage in our Christian growth – to be able to face trouble for what we believe. Jesus said that for those who are persecuted, the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. This is interesting, because it is exactly what He said about those who are poor in spirit. In other words, from the very beginning to the very end of our walk with God, the kingdom of heaven belongs to us. These are the only two *Happies* that offer a reward now; all the others have a reward in the future. We may have to wait to see God, to be called a son or daughter of God, or to inherit the earth, but wherever we may be in our Christian walk, we are always citizens of the kingdom of God. Yes, we have every reason to be happy.

TOPIC 3: SALT AND LIGHT

Matthew 5:13.
You are the salt of the earth.

Before we had fridges and freezers, salt was used to preserve meat. Salt can be used two ways: by sprinkling on meat when we eat it or by rubbing it right into the meat. Sprinkling it makes the meat taste good, but rubbing it in makes the meat last a lot longer before it goes bad.

Jesus said we are the salt of the earth. What did He mean? He meant that we can make the world a better place if we live the way He wants. We can all become sprinklers who make life taste better for people, most of whom have many problems to face. We can share their burdens and pray with them, and give them encouragement. This is what the Sprinkler does. On the other hand, some of us will be given the gift of influencing our communities for good. When our lives reflect the character of Jesus, people will turn away from their wrong behaviour and turn to God. When we do that, we are like salt rubbed into meat to preserve it. God wants us all to be Sprinklers and Influencers, and because He wants us to be, He will enable us to be if we let Him.

I once worked with a group of very rough men who worked hard, drank hard and lived hard. They got drunk

nearly every day, and got into fights all the time. However, there was one man in the group who was different; he never drank, he never got into a fight, and he never swore. He was friendly to everybody, but he never joined in their cheeky behaviour. We all respected him because he was fair and treated everyone the same. His family name was Evans, so we all called him 'Good Evans'. One day one of the men got drunk and tried to pick a fight with Good Evans, but Good Evans refused to fight. We all gathered around to watch while for two hours the drunk tried to hit him, but Good Evans would not hit back. Finally the exhausted drunk gave up, sat on the floor, and started to cry. We were all changed by that incident, and it seemed to me that the men became better people afterwards. Good Evans knew how to be an Influencer – he could change people's lives. He later told me that he was a follower of Jesus.

The world today is like rotting meat. Crime, vice, drugs, godlessness, corrupt leaders, war, disease, natural disaster, terrorism – the list goes on. If we truly follow Jesus, our presence can make a difference in our community so that the world can be a better place. That's what Jesus meant when He said we are the salt of the earth.

The strange thing is that we may not know what difference we are making in a community. We do not know today what the world would be like if there were no Sprinklers and Influencers. The world is pretty bad

today, but how much worse would it be if there was no one who was salt. Revelation 20:1-10, tells us that there will be a time when the redeemed will be safely with Jesus, while Satan and the unsaved will be on the earth. I wonder what life will be like for those on the earth with Satan as their leader, and all the Sprinklers and Influencers safely in heaven. Nobody to pray, nobody to offer a cup of water in Jesus' name, no promises from the Bible to give hope and encouragement. In that day, the unsaved still on the earth will pray to God to send back the Sprinklers and the Influencers, but they will not come.

Matthew 5:14-16.
You are the light of the world.

At night time when it is dark all around us, a great light arises in the sky to give the world light. That light is the moon. Yet, the moon is only a big rock – well, when I was very young I thought it was cheese, but when people landed a spacecraft on it in 1969, I found out it was rock. The problem is how a hunk of rock can shine so bright. Well, it doesn't shine by itself; it only reflects the light of the sun. The sun is a star, which burns red hot fire, and when its light hits the moon, the moon acts like a giant mirror reflecting the sun's light onto the earth.

When Jesus said we are the light of the world, He did not mean we are like the sun; we have no natural light that shines out of us. We are sinners by nature and our hearts are like rock. Rather, it is Jesus Himself who is like the sun; He is the true Light of the world. Revelation 21:23, says that in the new earth there will be no sun because it is Jesus who is its light. However, this old world is in darkness – a great spiritual darkness, and is in need of light. Jesus says we are that light. We cannot shine ourselves; we can only reflect the light of the Son of God just like the moon reflects the light of the sun.

What does it mean to reflect Christ? Well, when we see the moon, we are seeing the sun's light. Therefore, when people see us, they must see Christ's light. However, we need to be careful here. We need to be able to recognise the kind of character that reflects Christ. Just being nice is not enough and just being religious is not enough. Anybody can be nice if they want to be; anybody can act religious if it suits them. The character that reflects Christ is the one that treats people the way Jesus treated people. He was always kind, always put others before Himself, always willing to share, and always went out of His way to help others. On the other hand, He was very principled and never deceived people, never took advantage of them, never discouraged them. He never spoke down to them, but treated everybody as His equal and His friend. He never judged others. He loved everybody, and hated nobody.

He did not hate those who hated Him, but He did hate the things they did. The thing Jesus hated most of all was hypocrisy. He spoke strongly against people who pretended to be good when they weren't, and when they pretended to be more religious than others. If people did wrong, He would tell them so, but always in kindness. Therefore, if we want to reflect Christ, be must learn to treat people the same way.

TOPIC 4: THE LAW

Matthew 5:17-18.
I have not come to destroy the Law.

The Old Testament of the Bible has three sections: the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets. When the Bible talks of 'The Law', it means the first five books of the Bible. The Jews called it *Torah*. The Law contains all the laws that God gave the nation of Israel. These include the Ten Commandments, the ceremonial laws which involved sacrifice for sins and offerings, health and hygiene laws, laws concerning holiness, and laws about what was clean and unclean.

When the Old Testament refers to the Writings, it means the seventeen books from Joshua to Song of Solomon. This section contains the history of the Israelite nation and the nation's poetry and songs; they are the wisdom books.

When the Old Testament refers to the Prophets, it means all the seventeen books of the Major and Minor Prophets who instructed the people after the time of King Solomon. It covers those books from Isaiah to Malachi.

Jesus said He did not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them. He did not mention the

Writings because they were not a threat to anyone, and nobody ever wanted to destroy them. However, many people wanted to (and still want to) destroy the Law and the Prophets.

How did Jesus fulfil the Law and the Prophets? He fulfilled them because they pointed to Him. The Ten Commandments described the character of God, and of Jesus; the sacrifices pointed to His sacrifice on Calvary. The prophets and the writings reveal details of Jesus' life and death, all which came true just as predicted. The main way we can know that Jesus is the promised Redeemer is by reading what the Old Testament says about the Messiah, and then seeing those words played out in the life and death of Jesus who said, *"Search the Scriptures because they testify of me"* (John 5:39).

Matthew 5:19-20.
Those who teach that the Law is no longer to be kept.

Jesus knew there would always be people who would come and tell you that the Law does not have to be kept any more, or that the Law has been changed. Some say that we don't have to keep the Ten Commandments anymore because Jesus fulfilled the Law. It is true that the Old Testament sacrifices were fulfilled in Jesus' death, therefore there is no further need to offer a sacrifice, but that does not apply to the Ten Commandments which were written on stone by the

finger of God, and placed in the Ark of the Covenant as a perpetual reminder of their holiness. Talking of holiness, here is an interesting little piece:

> In the Middle East there is a land called the Holy Land,
> In the Holy Land there is a city called the Holy City,
> In the Holy City there is a hill called the Holy Mount,
> On the Holy Mount stands (stood) a building called the Holy Temple,
> In the Holy Temple there are two rooms called the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place,
> In the Most Holy Place is a holy chest called the Ark of the Covenant,
> In the Ark of the Covenant is placed the Holy Law of God, the Ten Commandments.

Perhaps next time someone tells you the Ten Commandments are done away with, you can remind them of this little piece of wisdom. The Ten Commandments lie at the Centre of everything that is holy.

A good way to know whether a particular Jewish law or custom is still binding, or is no longer necessary, is to ask yourself who it was given to. Was it given just to the Jews, or was it given to all humankind? For example circumcision was given to Abraham who was the father of the Jews; therefore it was only for the Jews. On the

other hand, the Sabbath was given to all humankind at the Creation; therefore it is for everybody, not just Jews. The distinction between clean and unclean foods was given to Noah after the Flood; therefore it is for all humankind, not just Jews.

TOPIC 5: MURDER

Matthew 5:21.
You have heard it said of old, 'You shall not murder'.

Sometimes, when we are given rules, we try to get around them by obeying the letter of the law, but not the spirit of the law. The spirit of the law is to do nothing to anyone that will unnecessarily hurt them or cause them suffering. The Jewish priests of Jesus' day abused the fifth Commandment, *"Honour your mother and father"* in this way. They said you should provide for your mother and father, but if you chose to give your money to the temple instead of to your parents, then that was better. In other words, they invented a law that opposed the Fifth Commandment (Mark 7:10-12). Jesus used the Sermon on the Mount to explain that treating somebody badly is just as bad as murdering them, and that if you deliberately insult someone, or damage their name, you are as good as murdering them because you are murdering their reputation.

Matthew 5:22.
Whoever says, "You fool" shall be in danger of hellfire.

When I lived in a village in Africa, I quickly learnt that the worst insult you could pay someone was to call them a fool. To call someone a fool was to cause a highly volatile

situation, not just from the insulted individual, but from friends and family. Perhaps it was the same in Israel because Jesus said that to call someone a fool was worthy of hellfire.

The word 'hellfire' – *Gehenna* - referred to the Valley of Hinnom which was situated outside Jerusalem and was used as a dump for the city's rubbish. It was left continually burning to get rid of the trash that was dumped there every day. Dead dogs and other such matter were also left there to be burned up. Jesus said that if you called someone a fool, you were in danger of being thrown in this valley.

Matthew 5:23-26.
If you bring your gift to the altar.

In ancient Israel, whenever the people sinned against God or their neighbour, they would bring a clean animal such as a sheep or a dove to the temple for the priest to offer as a sacrifice. This was a way of saying sorry to God. The idea of the sacrifice was to seek peace with God so that we can be restored to a right relationship with Him.

However, Jesus says we should also say sorry to the person we have sinned against. If we hurt someone, It is not enough just to say sorry to God, we must also say sorry to the person we hurt. In fact, we should say sorry

to the person we hurt *before* we say sorry to God. Therefore, this passage says that if we go to say sorry to God, and then remember we have not made it right with our neighbour, brother or sister, we should leave our offering with the priest, go back and make it right with the other person, and then come back and finish making the offering.

Now you might say that your brother sinned against you, therefore why should you go to him? Surely, you think, he or she should come to you. Well, yes, perhaps that person should come to you first, but if you remember the *Happies*, you will remember that one of them was, *"Happy are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons (and daughters) of God."* This is the perfect opportunity to be a peacemaker. Read the part about peacemakers again to see how important this is. Yes, the person has wronged you, but go anyway and tell him or her that you forgive them for what they have done. That way, you are now ready to go and offer your sacrifice.

TOPIC 6: ADULTERY

Matthew 5:27-32.
You shall not commit adultery.

Of all the Commandments, this is probably the least popular. People understand that it is wrong to have a sexual relationship with someone who is married to someone else, but they do not understand that the spirit of the Commandment, like the one against murder, goes much deeper than that. For example, a married man who commits adultery with another woman causes terrible hurt to his wife. Even for a man to look with sex eyes at a woman is just as much adultery because that also hurts his wife as well as insults the woman.

The intent of the Commandments is to teach God's people to live holy lives. Therefore, Jesus says, it is better to remove an offending eye or a sinful hand, and enter heaven disfigured, than it is to enter hell in one piece. Of course, Jesus was not speaking literally because we would all be blind and have no hands (nor ears and feet either for that matter), but He did want us to understand that heaven is looking for citizens who have the Law of God written on their hearts.

One of the reasons God wants our marriages to be holy and undefiled is because a godly marriage illustrates the

relationship between God and people. As God loves and cares for us, and is even willing to die for us, so should the husband be to his wife. As we are loyal and faithful to God living pure lives before Him, so should the wife be to her husband. This marriage illustration is found right through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and it is the subject of many of Jesus' great parables like the Wedding Garment (Matthew 22:2-14), and the Bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-13). That is why God says, *"As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so the Lord rejoices over you"* (Isaiah 62:5), and why Revelation 19:7-9 describes the heavenly reunion between Jesus and the redeemed as a great marriage feast, and says, *"Happy are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb"*.

TOPIC 7: MAKING PROMISES

Matthew 5:33-37.
You shall not break your oath.

How many times have you heard someone say, "I swear in God's name I will pay you back the money I borrowed"? Mentioning the name of God, or swearing on the Bible is meant to convince people that we will do what we say we will do because we are good people who do the right thing. Jesus did not like this kind of talk. He tells us that we have no right to involve heaven in our promises. We should not even swear by our head because we have no control over what happens to our head. What God wants from us is to do what we say we will do.

It is natural for us to want people to think well of us, but it does cost us something to keep our word. If someone says to you, "I'll pay you back tomorrow", you are disappointed when they don't pay you back. If that person says, "I swear in God's name I will pay you back tomorrow", then not only are you disappointed, but you also doubt the person's honesty before God. Jesus tells us in this passage not to say you will pay back the money tomorrow if you know you will not be able to pay it back tomorrow. Better to say you cannot pay it back tomorrow, but will pay it back as soon as you can.

The reason people say they will pay it back tomorrow is because they want us to think they are good people. Therefore, every time you see them they tell you they will pay you back tomorrow, but somehow tomorrow never comes. On the other hand people do not want to admit they cannot pay the money back tomorrow because it makes them look bad. So those people keep on making promises about tomorrow and never keep them. For a Christian to do this brings shame to Christ, which is a sin. Psalm 37:21 says, *"The wicked person borrows and doesn't repay"*. The only way to avoid this problem is to let your 'Yes' be 'Yes, and your 'No' be 'No'. In other words, do what you say you will do, and don't do what you say you will not do. Anything more than that is to do what Satan does.

TOPIC 8: DEALING WITH UNFRIENDLY PEOPLE

Matthew 5:38-42.
An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

This topic is all about how to deal with people who treat us badly. This is one of the most difficult topics in the Sermon on the Mount because it seems so natural to do back to someone what they did to us. We often feel that justice has not been done if we don't do back to someone what they did to us. In other words if someone hits me and damages my eye, or breaks my tooth, it seems right that I should be able to hurt his eye or break his tooth.

However, it is not as simple as that. Did he deliberately hurt me, or was it an accident? Was he acting out of anger, or was he administering justice? Did he have the right to administer justice? In a case like this it is better if the matter is brought to a council of wise elders who can look into it and decide what should be done. When we give the elders time to discuss the matter and consider what to do, it also gives us time to calm down and get over the anger. That way we can avoid doing something that we regret later. Most family conflicts can be avoided if the one wronged is able to follow the advice given by Jesus.

So what is Jesus' advice? His advice is so radical that we hardly see how we can follow it. He says that when someone hits you on the cheek, you should not hit him back. Rather, you should turn the other cheek to him so that he can hit that one too. He says that if someone demands your coat; give him your shirt too. If someone demands you to carry their stuff for a kilometre, carry it two kilometres.

The idea intended here is that when we are provoked, we should not respond back the same way, but should try to defuse the situation and reveal to the onlookers that the other person is at fault.

Imagine you have just hit someone because you are angry with them, and then the person you hit turns his or her face so that you can hit them again. What are you going to do? Will you hit them again? If you do, all the people watching will know that you are "the bad guy", and their sympathy will be for the one you hit. You will be the loser. If you are wise you will not hit them again, you will apologise for hitting them the first time. Do you remember the verse, *"Happy are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God"*. When the person you hit turned the other cheek, he became a peacemaker. How many conflicts could be avoided by following this advice?

TOPIC 9: LOVING YOUR ENEMY

Matthew 5:43-48.
Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you….

This is another piece of advice difficult to follow. It is easy to love our family and friends; it is easy to hate those who hate us. However, God says we must love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who treat us badly. If we do that, Jesus says, the Father will call us his own sons and daughters. In fact, Jesus says, we must do this if we want to be called sons and daughters of the Father. Perhaps then it is more important than we thought that we practice doing this. Sometimes we think we are being a good Christian just by being nice to people. Well, anyone can be nice to their friends; we need to get used to being nice to our enemies.

Then Jesus says something very unusual; He says we should be perfect just as God is perfect. But how can we be as perfect as God? We need to understand two things about this odd statement: the first is that the word 'perfect' does not mean 'without any faults', it means 'mature', like a piece of fruit that is perfect to eat. The second thing is that this 'perfect' is linked to loving, blessing, doing well, and praying for our enemies. In

other words, if we can do those things for the people who hate us, then we are perfect in God's sight just as He is perfect. This is the most amazing thing about the Gospel – when we are right with God, he considers us as perfect. It is not our behaviour that is perfect; it is our standing in the sight of God that is perfect.

When a baby is born, it cannot walk, talk, or do good deeds. All it can do is make noise and make a mess in its nappy. Yet when you look at it you see it is perfect, and you love it. That is how God sees us. When we are born again, we are a spiritual baby; we cannot preach, or give Bible studies, and can't do many good deeds. All we can do is make mistakes and struggle to get it right. Yet when God looks at us He sees we are perfect, because we are just as He intended us to be. A year later, we have grown spiritually, and are beginning to eat spiritual solid food instead of just the milk of the Word. We still make mistakes, but we are perfect in God's sight because we are as He intended us to be. This growth in perfection continues through every stage in our lives until one day, by God's grace, we become peacemakers – just as God intended us to be.

The point is this: we do not grow *toward* perfection; we grow *in* perfection.

TOPIC 10: IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

Matthew 6:1-18.
Truly, I tell you, they have their reward.

The story is told of a young missionary who was sent to work in a faraway land. As he was waiting in the departure lounge to board his economy class flight, he saw that there was a lot of activity outside the VIP lounge. It turned out that a very rich and important young diplomat was on his flight – first class of course – who was being seen off with lots of media attention, cameras popping, banners, and what have you. Nobody noticed the young missionary quietly board his flight, and nobody noticed him when he got off the plane at his destination.

Well, the young missionary worked quietly in that faraway land for fifty years, enduring trials and hardship, and hardly anybody even knew he was there. When he finally left his mission post, it was an old and sick man who arrived back home, and there was nobody there to meet him. But as he cleared customs and entered the arrivals hall, he saw that there was a great media frenzy with banners and cameras popping, lots of people cheering the arrival of a rich and important diplomat who had spent fifty years doing great things for his country and becoming world famous. Then the old

missionary noticed that it was the same diplomat he had seen fifty years ago.

When the old missionary went to bed that night he had a dream. In his dream he complained to God that the diplomat had had so much reward for his fifty years of service, while he, the missionary, had come home in complete obscurity. When God had listened to the old missionary's complaint, He said to him, "My son, the diplomat received his reward today, but you have not arrived home yet".

This story teaches us that God does not necessarily give earthly rewards for heavenly work. Nor does He give heavenly rewards for earthly work. You see, there were religious people in Jesus' day who liked to be seen to be very religious. Therefore, they would go to a place where there were lots of people, and make a big show of giving money, praying, fasting, or helping someone. They wanted to impress everybody with how good and important they were, and people cheered them for their good deeds. However, Jesus said that that was the only reward they would ever get; there would be no reward for them in heaven.

We are all a bit like those religious people. We all like to be respected and seen as important, but it does not impress God. What impresses God is for us to live quiet holy lives, making sure we are doing His will, and not worrying about what the world thinks. Not just in giving

money, but in everything we do. Worldly people want to be noticed by the world, but we are not of the world. What we do is for God's eyes only, and He will reward according to His will, whether it be in this word or the next.

TOPIC 11: HOW TO PRAY

Matthew 6:9-15.
Pray like this: Our Father in Heaven.

We have come to call this prayer "The Lord's Prayer". Many Christian people repeat it when they want to pray, and it is often used as a part of the worship service. The Lord's Prayer is said at the beginning of a session of Parliament. However, Christianity is becoming a minority religion in many countries, and people want to remove The Lord's Prayer from Parliaments. I wonder if God is happy that we are beginning to leave Him out of the running of our country. Does He bless those countries that include Him in their parliaments?

It is good for us to repeat the Lord's Prayer when we pray. However, I think Jesus intended the prayer to be more than just words to repeat, because when you repeat words over many times they become meaningless. That is why Jesus said in verse 7, *"When you pray do not use vain repetitions like the heathen who think they will be heard for their many words"*. I think Jesus meant us to model our prayers on The Lord's Prayer, but not just to quote it without really thinking about what we are saying. Let's take a closer look at the Lord's Prayer. It has seven parts to it (funny how often we find the number seven in the Bible, isn't it!).

1. Our Father in heaven, holy is your name.
2. Let your kingdom come.
3. Let your will be done on earth just the way it is in heaven.
4. Give us today our daily food.
5. Forgive us our sins in just the same way as we forgive those who sin against us.
6. Keep us from being tempted, and deliver us from Satan's tricks.
7. For the kingdom of heaven, and all power and glory belong to You. Amen.

So, let's take a closer look at these seven parts:

1. ***Our Father in heaven, holy is your name.*** When we come before God, we should recognise exactly into whose presence we are coming. This is our Creator – not just *our* Creator, but the Creator of the whole universe. If there are any other inhabited worlds out there, He created them too. Now, if I had to appear before the Queen of England, I would be pretty nervous about how I should act or what I should say. That is the way it should be. When you think about it, it is an amazing thing that we all, no matter how poor, or how unimportant we are, can come into the presence of God whenever we like. We can't do that with the Queen no matter how rich and important we are.

2. *Let your kingdom come.*

There are two parts to the kingdom of God, the *kingdom of Grace*, and the *kingdom of Glory*. When Jesus came to earth He established the kingdom of Grace. He came as a king, and a king must have a kingdom. During His ministry, Jesus healed the sick, caused the blind to see, made the lame walk, and forgave repentant people their sins. He did this because in His kingdom these things will not exist.

The kingdom of Grace exists on the earth today, but the kingdom has not come in all its fullness; that will happen on the day Jesus returns in power and glory. That is what Jesus is asking us to pray for. In the original language of the New Testament, the words, "Let your kingdom come", suggest a single action – something that was to happen just once. Therefore, Jesus was saying that although we are citizens of the kingdom already, we should pray for that great day when He will return to earth, and the kingdom of Grace will become the kingdom of Glory.

3. *Let your will be done on earth just the way it is in heaven.*

In heaven, everybody does the will of God. It is the joy and privilege of the angels to obey His every word. When Christ comes back, the redeemed will live in the presence of God, and will also love to do His will. Therefore, Jesus says that if we are citizens of heaven now, then we must live the way we will live in heaven.

Imagine if everybody on earth today lived only to serve God and do whatever He told us to do, to go wherever He told us to go - not because of a sense of duty, but because we wanted nothing more than to do it. Imagine the kind of world we would live in. That is exactly the kind of world God wants us to live in, but He always gives us the choice as to whether we will or not.

4. *Give us today our daily food.*

If Jesus says 'give us today', He means that today we can ask only for today's food, and tomorrow we must ask for tomorrow's food. That means we have to ask every day. If we have a fridge or a pantry, we probably have tomorrow's food in the house already. Some of us live in places where you have to buy food for one or two weeks, or even a month. However, there are many people in the world who only have food for today, and don't know where tomorrow's food will come from. Those people have hard lives, but they are blessed by having to turn to God every day.

When the Israelites left Egypt and went into the desert, they had no food. Therefore, God sent them stuff called "What is it?" They had never seen it before, and didn't know what it was, so they called it "What is it?", or *Manna* in their language. They quickly found out that if they collected more than they could eat in one day, the leftover went bad. Therefore they learned to depend on God every day for their daily food. However, they were told not to collect any Manna on the Sabbath because

the Sabbath was not to be an ordinary day. This is an important lesson for us: On Sabbath, if possible, we should not go shopping or spend a lot of time preparing food. That should be done on Friday. We know this because God told the people to gather twice as much on Friday so that they would have food for Sabbath. On Sabbath the leftovers did not go bad. Only on the other days did the leftovers go bad. Notice that God wants us to eat on Sabbath, but not to go looking for our food on Sabbath. The Israelites lived in the desert for forty years, and all that time God gave them Manna to eat. This is a wonderful lesson in God's care for us, as well as a forty-year lesson on how to keep the Sabbath.

You may ask, "But what about famines – why does God allow people to die in famines?" Good question! There have always been famines, and always will be famines. Jesus' words apply to famines even more than when there is no famine. When there is a famine, the hungry people turn to God to ask for food. God hears their cry and sends people from across the sea to help them. That is the way God normally helps – He uses people who will respond to His call to go and help. A better question is, "What can I do to help feed the hungry".

5. ***Forgive us our sins in just the same way as we forgive those who sin against us.***

This is perhaps the least followed part of the Lord's Prayer. For that reason, Jesus returns to it when the prayer is finished. There, He explains that if we do not

forgive those who hurt us, He will not forgive us. Notice that these words are not a request for our sins to be forgiven; they are a request to be treated as we treat others. If we do not forgive, then we are actually saying, "Don't forgive my sins because I do not forgive others". This can be difficult because when we are hurt, our sense of indignation kicks in, and we want to see justice done. This is natural, but God tells us it is not for us to seek vengeance; *"Payback is Mine"*, *says the Lord*, *"I will pay back"* (Romans 12:19-21). When we help those who hurt us, and show kindness to those who are unkind to us, we *"heap coals of fire on their heads"*. That means we make them feel very guilty about what they are doing.

6. Keep us from being tempted, and deliver us from evil.

As Christians, we have a responsibility to examine our lives for weaknesses that might come between us and God. That takes a bit of honesty, but we must be honest with God, and honest with ourselves. People who go to Alcoholics Anonymous know that they cannot overcome grog until they recognise they have a grog problem. It is the same with all the things that have the power to lead us away from God. Pornography, gambling, sex, drugs, love of money; Christians can also become addicted to these things. In fact, it can be worse for Christians because they often feel shame and guilt, knowing that their body is like the Temple of God in which the Holy Spirit wants to live (1Corinthians 6:19). Therefore, they

fear the Holy Spirit cannot dwell in them while all this bad stuff is in them too. The good news is that because they have this shame and guilt, they can know the Holy Spirit has not left them; if He had left them, they would not feel any shame and guilt.

In the Lord's Prayer Jesus asks us to pray that we not be led into temptation. This is the key to overcoming; we must avoid the associations with whatever is our particular addiction. If its grog, stay clear of the pub and bottle shop; make them no-go zones. If it's gambling, make any building that has pokies off limits. If it is pornography, put your computer, if you have one, in a public part of the house where people can see the screen. After all, there's no point in asking God not to lead us into temptation if we're going to lead ourselves into it.

Why would God lead us into temptation anyway? Well, not all temptations come from what is bad. God may have given someone the gift of being a great preacher, teacher, musician or singer. He could have allowed someone to have money, beauty or influence. That person could be in danger of becoming proud and falling into sin. After all, isn't that what happened to Lucifer? Jesus is saying that if He has given us good gifts, we must pray that those gifts will never cause us to sin.

7. ***For the kingdom of heaven, and all power and glory belong to You. Amen.***

When Pilate told Jesus he had the power to crucify or release Him, Jesus said, *"You have no power except what has been given to you from above* (John 19:11)." In the Lord's Prayer Jesus reminds us that God is the only One with any power, and if anyone or anything else has power, it is only because God has given it to them. We should remember that when we feel strong. Perhaps that's why God told the Israelites not to rely on horses; because sitting on a horse makes people feel strong. But when you sit on a donkey, you feel a bit humble. So Jesus chose to enter Jerusalem sitting on the back of a donkey. It doesn't look very kingly, but earthly power must always be mixed with humility because the real power comes from God, not the man on the horse.

TOPIC 12: TREASURE

Matthew 6:19-21.

Store your treasure in heaven, not on earth.

The story is told of a very rich man who was had stored up a lot of gold, and kept it hidden in his house. One night he dreamed that an angel visited him and told him that he would die that night, and must appear before the judgment. But the rich man pled with the angel to be allowed to take a suitcase with him. The angel thought that was a bit dumb, but told him to go and get a suitcase. The man ran down to his basement and filled his biggest suitcase with gold bars. The suitcase was so heavy that the man could not pick it up, so he asked the angel to carry it. The angel was easily strong enough to carry the suitcase, so, with a funny look on his face, he picked up the suitcase and the two of them travelled to the gates of heaven. When they arrived at the big pearly gates there was a mighty angel there who was very interested to know why the rich man had brought a suitcase with him. So he asked the rich man to open it, and when he did so, the suitcase was full of gold bars. The mighty angel looked into the case and said, "What's this? Paving stones?"

Well, this is only a story, but it helps us to see how little point there is in collecting treasure on earth when Revelation 21:21, says that in heaven the streets are

made of gold. Better to store the treasure in heaven because on earth what is not damaged will be stolen, and what is not stolen will be taxed.

What kind of treasures should we be collecting that will be useful to us in heaven. Not gold because that is used to make roads. What about honesty, kindness, helpfulness, compassion, faith, hope, love? If we want to know what the truly important things are, we can look at the character of Jesus, and imitate Him. Then we will be truly rich in heaven and on earth.

TOPIC 13: THE EYE

Matthew 6:22-23.
The eye is the light of the body.

Today we might say the eye is like a window. If the window is clean it can let light into a room, but if it is dirty, the room will be full of darkness. Light enters the body only through the eye, therefore if the eye doesn't work, then the person lives in a world of darkness.

Of course Jesus was talking about spiritual light and spiritual darkness. He is the Light of the world, and He wants to shine into us so that we can see spiritual things. The Light of Christ cannot shine into the body of someone who cannot see spiritual things. If we cannot see spiritual things then we must ask God to open our eyes so that the light can come in. In 1536, William Tyndale was murdered for translating the Bible into English. The only Bibles in existence were written in Latin, and the common people could not read Latin. As Tyndale was dying, his last words were, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes". Now we know what he meant; he meant that if the light of the Bible, now in English, could enter the king's eyes, he would be able to see that God wanted him to make sure everyone had a copy of this wonderful Bible in their own language. God answered that prayer, and today the Bible is in almost every language of the earth.

TOPIC 14: TWO MASTERS

Matthew 6:24.

No-one can serve two masters.

Do you know anyone who lives with their husband or wife and their mother-in-law in the same house? They will probably complain that they have two masters. They will usually love one and hate the other, and when they do what one says, the other will tell them they are doing it wrong. The joys of marriage!

However, Jesus was not talking just about earthly things; He was talking about heavenly things. One Master is God; the other is Satan. You cannot serve both of them; you cannot belong half to the Church and half to the world. If you think you can go to church and be holy one day, and then steal money the next, people will say that you are a hypocrite – and they will be right.

"You cannot serve God and mammon," Jesus says. Mammon is anything that comes between us and God. It might be money; it might be expensive clothes or cars; it might be grog; it might be the desire to be rich; it might be the desire for power. If you choose mammon, Jesus will not feel welcome in your life. If you choose Jesus, you will have to put all the other things away. If you try to have Jesus *and* the other things, you will probably lose both.

TOPIC 15: WORRY

Matthew 6:25-34.

Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life….

Verses 19-24 relate to the first half of the Lord's Prayer, our acceptance of God, our willingness to do His will on earth just as it is done in heaven. The rest of Chapter 6, verses 25-34, concern the second half of the prayer, especially the words, *"Give us today our daily food"*. If we seek God daily, He will provide for us daily. Therefore we do not have to worry about tomorrow, only ask for today. So, let's look at this last section of Chapter 6.

As we have just seen, this verse takes us back to the Lord's Prayer, especially the part that says, *"Give us today our daily food"*. When Jesus repeats a point, it is because it is important for us to remember. Now He teaches a lesson from nature: birds do not build sheds to store food in, and flowers do not sew clothing for themselves, but you never see the birds go hungry, and when you closely examine a flower, you will find its structure and beauty to be amazing.

I have noticed that the more people have, the more they worry. I think they are worried about losing what they have. If you don't have anything, you have nothing to lose, so you don't worry. That brings us back to the treasure; if we store it up on earth, we worry about it,

but if we store it up in heaven, we don't have to worry about it because nobody will ever take it from us.

Jesus ends this topic with one of the most important verses in the Bible, *"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you"*. This little verse provides the answer to the problem of the two masters and the mammon; seek the righteousness of God first, and He will make you righteous. Then, when you are righteous, He will add to you the true riches of heaven: faith, love, hope, peace, a calm spirit, wisdom. Then you will have no interest in the casino or the fancy car; you will want only to do God's will.

TOPIC 16: JUDGING OTHERS

Matthew 7:1-2.
Do not judge others, and they will not judge you.

Once, when Jesus was in Jerusalem, some priests came and threw a woman at His feet. They had caught her in the act of committing adultery. The punishment for adultery was death by stoning. However, they wanted to know what Jesus would do with her. This was not because they wanted to learn from Jesus, but because they wanted to find an excuse for having Him killed. If He said that they should show mercy, they would accuse Him of breaking the Law of Moses; if He said she should be stoned, they would report Him to the Romans for taking the law into His own hands. They thought this was a win-win situation for them. In fact it was probably a set-up arranged by the priests.

Jesus quickly saw through their hypocrisy, and started writing in the dirt. People leaned over to see what He was writing, and when they read it, they slunk away one by one. It doesn't say what He wrote, but it must have been something about each one of them that they wanted kept pretty quiet. Finally, there was no one left except Jesus and the woman, and He told her He would not condemn her, but that she should go home and not sin again.

You notice that in this event, the priests judged the woman as worthy of death, but Jesus never judged her. However, by their hypocrisy they brought judgment upon themselves. It was they who went away condemned, not the woman. This is what these verses are saying to us. Don't judge others otherwise you will be condemned yourself. If I look down on people, God will look down on me. If I always give people a fair go, God will give me a fair go. As we judge others, so God will judge us. Make sure you are behaving right before you try to correct others. If you are behaving wrong, how can you tell others to behave right? Don't be a hypocrite.

TOPIC 17: INSTRUCTION IN CHRISTIAN LIVING.

Matthew 7:3-*6*.
***Do not give holy things to dogs and expensive things to pigs*.**

If meat from a holy temple sacrifice was given to the dog, it would eat it without any knowledge of the holiness of what it was eating. If you gave pearls to a pig, the pig would think they were food, but then turn on you in anger when they found out they were only stones. Dogs and pigs are both considered unclean in the Bible, and they represent those people who would despise the holy Word of God. Do not try to give a Bible study to a drunk, wait until he or she is sober and repentant. Do not anoint the sick when they fully intend to continue the lifestyle that made them sick, wait until they join those who are poor in spirit and who mourn.

Sometimes, when we share the Word of God, there are people listening who will use our words against us. I was once visiting a Communist country, and went to our church there on Sabbath. Before I went into the church, my host said to me, “Be very careful what you say to the head elder; he is a communist agent and will report everything you say to the government”. That head elder was like the pig who was given the pearls of the Gospel, but who turned on the people who gave them to him.

Matthew 7:7-12.
Ask, and it will be given to you…

If you want a good illustration of how God loves us, think about how we humans love our children. How many of us will banish our children from the house because they have been naughty? How many of us will refuse to feed them when they say they are hungry? We are all sinful people, but we still love our children and want what is best for them.

However, we somehow always expect God to be angry with us and severely punish us when we sin against Him. Satan delights in making people think that God is a stern and heartless judge who is looking for every excuse to send us to hell. Some preachers add to this terror by telling people that if they sin they will be sent to burn forever.

The truth is that God calls us His children. He calls us children because He wants us to know that He cares about us just as we care for our children. So, if we sinners care for our children, how much more will God who is sinless care for us?

Verse 12 is one of the most important verses in the whole Bible. We should all learn it by heart: *"Whatever you want people to do to you, do to them"*. Think about

how you want someone to treat you. You want to be respected, treated like an intelligent person, liked, and spoken to as an equal. You want people to be honest with you, and you want them to believe you when you tell them something. You do not want them to tell lies about you, or say bad things about you.

Therefore, Jesus says if that is how you want people to treat you, then make sure that's how you treat them. If we all did that we would all find life much easier. Imagine a Community in which everyone was like that. What a great place to live!

Matthew 7:13-14.
Enter in by the narrow gate.

In these two little verses, Jesus says a lot, for He is painting a picture of someone setting out on life's journey. Imagine you are now old enough to leave your parents and set out on your own. As you put on your backpack and walk down the track away from your house you come to a fork in the road. Which way will you go? One way is dusty, narrow and winding; it looks dangerous and uninviting, and seems to be uphill all the way. You notice that there is hardly anybody on the road. You look in the direction it will take you, and you see in the far distance a glow of light reaching up into the sky, and you know that light is the Heavenly City.

The other road is wide and straight, sealed with bitumen, and has rest areas along the way. As you look in the direction it is going, you see billboards advertising the joys to be found at its destination. You see many people on the road. It seems to be downhill all the way, but when you look in the direction it will take you, there is only darkness.

Which road will you take? Jesus did not come to make your life easy; He came to save you. He cannot tell you to take the easy road because He knows it leads to destruction. Therefore He tells you to take the difficult road. Difficult because your choice to serve Him will lead to problems at work and in the family, difficult because you will have to sacrifice the things you enjoy, difficult because you will always be resisting temptation. You realise that these hardships will be with you as long as you choose to remain on this narrow and uphill road. However, the great thing about hills is the view you get from the top. On top of the hill you can see in the distance the City of God and all its glory.

Therefore, you decide to take the narrow and winding road, but soon a Christian friend coming the other way meets you and tells you that it is not necessary to take this road. He tells you the Christian life is one of joy and happiness because you are saved. God blesses you with wealth and happiness, he tells you, because you are no longer under the law, but under grace. You observe that the Christians on the wide and easy road waltz happily

through life carrying their cross in a comfortable backpack. When they see you struggling along the way they say, “Don’t worry. Be happy and pray. God loves you”. But they don’t stop to help you. The wide and easy road appears attractive, even to the Christian, but when you reach the end of that road, you realise it was the wrong one. We will look further at this subject when we get to Topic 19.

TOPIC 18: FALSE PROPHETS

Matthew 7:15-20.
Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing.

The people Jesus spoke these words to were Galilean Jews. Their understanding of a true or false prophet was based on Isaiah 8:20, *To the Law and to the Testimony! If they speak not according to this word, there is no light in* them**.** In the days of Jesus, anyone who gave a message not in harmony with this was a false prophet. The Law and the Testimony was another way of saying the Bible. As mentioned in Topic 4, the Bible has three sections, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (read Topic 4 again to refresh your memory). Therefore the Law was the first five books of the Bible, and Testimony was the testimony, or witness, of the Biblical prophets. Today we would say the same thing, that a true prophet is one who teaches the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

Yet, even those who believe and teach the Bible will tell you different things. How shall we know which is the right voice? Well, Jesus told us that if anyone lifts Him up, even if they have some other teachings, regard them as friends because *"whoever is not against us is for us"* (Mark 9:38-41). Therefore we should not treat other Bible believers as enemies just because some doctrines are different from ours.

However, if you are the kind of person who wants to follow Truth to the best of your ability, you will need to study the Bible a bit more closely if you are told something different from what you already believe.

The best thing to do is to develop the habit of reading the Bible daily, or listening to it on a tape or God-pod. As time goes by and you are reading every day, you will begin to recognise when something doesn't sound right. It's a bit like sheep which get used to the sound of the shepherd's voice. When they hear a different voice they do not follow it. Here's an example of what I mean:

I once read in a book that you don't have to worry about the Law of God anymore because it was nailed to the Cross. If the Ten Commandments were nailed to the Cross when Jesus died, then obviously the Law is dead. That did not seem right to me because He said He did not come to destroy the law (Matthew 5:17), and He said, *"If you love me keep My commandments"* (John 14:15). How then could the Law be nailed to the Cross?

So, I decided to study the matter. They were quoting Colossians 2:14, which says that God forgave us all our sins *"by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."*

So we have to ask, what was nailed to the Cross? The answer is *'the record of debt that stood against us'*. Is this the Law? No, the Law is not a record of our debts, or sins, it is a mirror that shows us when we are sinning. If I have mud on my face, or jam on my chin, the mirror will tell me. The mirror can never clean the mud or the jam from my face, but it can send me to the soap and water. In the same way the Law cannot take away my sin, but it can send me to Christ to be cleaned.

So why nail the mirror to the Cross? Obviously that would not be helpful. The passage must mean something else. What then is *'the record of debt that stood against us'?* It is simply the record of our sins which we will be given on Judgment Day if we have not confessed and repented of those sins. Once we do confess them and repent of them, then they are nailed to the Cross of Christ, and covered by His blood on the Cross.

In fact, the original language word was 'handwriting of debt', or in other words, what we call today an IOU, or an invoice. When you owed money or goods, you were given a written list of what you owed. This is what was nailed to the Cross; the original language word for *Law*, is something completely different.

Therefore, when we are told the Bible says this or that, we must be like those Berean people who tested

everything they were told, to see if it was what was taught in the Bible (Acts 17:11).

TOPIC 19: BEING A TRUE FOLLOWER OF JESUS

Matthew 7:21-23.
Not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven.

This is another tough talk from Jesus. "If you're going to follow me", He says, "Do it all the way. Let your walk be the same as your talk".

Some years ago a popular TV preacher used to draw thousands of people to his church through his healing ministry. He would interrupt his sermon and say something like "The Lord is talking to me, He is telling me there is a lady in church today who has come for healing. She is called Mavis Smith (not her real name), and she comes from New York. Where are you Mavis? You are wearing a blue coat. You have cancer and have been praying to the Lord for healing. The Lord has told me about you and told me you are here today with your daughter. Stand up Mavis Smith; come forward and be healed, for the Lord will heal you today". There is silence in the church as people watch to see what will happen. Suddenly two women sitting together among the thousands timidly stand up, the older of them wearing a blue coat. In bewilderment, the younger woman helps the older woman to the front. "I am Mavis Smith says the woman in the blue coat, and I come from New York. Last year I was diagnosed with cancer, but I have been

praying to God that He will let me live because of the work I have been doing for my church. They praise God and weep together as the preacher reaches out to them in love. The preacher cries out, “Sister Mavis, see the glory of God today, for the Lord has heard your prayer”. With that he smacks her forehead so that she falls back into the arms of an elder who has moved in behind her. “Praise God”, he says, “You are healed”. Joyfully the two women return to their seats praising God and saying “Hallelujah”. A month later the woman dies from her cancer. Meanwhile donations pour into the bank account of the great preacher from all the people who saw this take place on television.

What happened here? Who was this great man of God? Well, it turned out that there was someone who had seen this happen several times and thought there was something suspicious about it. So, he decided to watch closely what was going on. On the day of Mavis Smith’s “healing” he was waiting by the church entrance as the people were coming into church. There he saw the preacher’s wife talking to people as they came in. He moved closer to hear what was being said. The preacher’s wife was talking to two women, the older one wearing a blue coat. The wife was asking the women about themselves; what were their names, where did they come from, why had they come. Soon the preacher’s wife had the information she needed, and pulled a communication device from her bag, and started talking into it. Her husband was inside on the

stage. In his ear was a small earpiece, and he listened as his wife told him about Mavis Smith. Mavis died unhealed, and many others who thought they had been healed found out they were not. But the man and his wife became very rich. A true story!

In the judgment, that preacher and his wife will come before the Lord Jesus and will say, “Lord, Lord, did we not do wonderful things in your name?” But Jesus will say, “depart from me you workers of iniquity; I never knew you”.

CONCLUSION

Matthew 7:24-28.
The wise man built his house upon a rock.

On the front cover of this little book you can see a lighthouse built on a rock off the coast of France. It is called *La Jument Rock Lighthouse*. In 1989 a photographer hired a helicopter during a storm in order to take some photographs of the lighthouse in the storm. When the lighthouse keeper heard the helicopter, he came out to see what was going on. Just as he came outside, a large wave hit the rock and the man scrambled back inside with less than a second to spare before he would have been washed into the sea. The photographer in the helicopter snapped this shot at exactly the moment the wave hit.

This picture is a wonderful illustration of those people who build their lives on Jesus Christ. When the Israelites first came out of Egypt and went to live in the desert, they needed water to wash and to drink. At the place they were camping there was a large rock, and God told Moses to take his rod and hit the rock. When Moses struck the rock, water began to flow from it, and it continued to flow so that there was enough water for everybody as well as all the animals. The story is found in Exodus 17. In 1Corinthians 10:4, the Apostle Paul reminds us that that rock was a type of Christ. He says, *For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed*

them, *and the Rock was Christ*. Jesus was also calling Himself the Rock when He said to Peter, "*Upon this Rock I will build my church*" (Matthew 16:18).

In the picture on the front cover, the rock on which the lighthouse sits represents Jesus, and the lighthouse itself represents Jesus the Light of the world. The man in the picture was outside the lighthouse at the time the picture was taken, and if he had not moved very quickly he would have been washed away. It was only *in* the lighthouse that he was safe. The lighthouse could not move because it was built on a rock. The lesson is clear: we are safe from the storms of life only when we are in Christ. To come out of Christ even for a second is unsafe.

Jesus ends His Sermon on the Mount with this story that is so simple, yet so profound. Those who take to heart the words of this sermon will build their lives on the Rock which is Christ. Those who choose not to do so will be building their lives on sand and will be washed away by the first storm that comes along. Jesus never forces people to follow Him; He just presents the right way and says, "This is the way, walk in it". The man on the front cover is wise because his house is built on a rock. Will you, dear reader, build your life on the Rock?